

Rocky Mountain

Administrative History



CHAPTER II:

ENOS MILLS AND THE CREATION OF THE PARK

Enos Abijah Mills, who was credited with leading the campaign for establishing a national park in the Estes Park area, had made the Longs Peak valley his home since 1886. He had been born near Fort Scott, Kansas, on April 22, 1870, and had moved west alone as a boy of sixteen to live in the mountains. His love for them is attested by the fact that subsequently he climbed Longs Peak more than 250 times. Meanwhile, as a devoted outdoorsman, he had, by 1902, camped in every state of the Union, as well as in Mexico, Canada, and Alaska. Before 1915, he had established his reputation as a naturalist, conservationist, author, and publicist, especially of the Estes Park region. [1]

While on a camping trip in California in 1889, Mills had met John Muir, the noted naturalist. Muir urged Mills to take up the study of nature lore and introduced him to the values of national parks. In 1891, Mills accompanied a survey party to Yellowstone National Park, and later recalled that it was at that time that he first began to consider the possibilities of advocating the creation of a national park near his Colorado home. During the next twenty years, Mills became increasingly convinced that the area along the front range of the mountains from Longs Peak to Pikes Peak should be reserved and protected for the enjoyment of all citizens before the area could be expropriated in piecemeal fashion by lumbering, mining, and cattle interests. [2]

To publicize his ideas, Mills became the Estes Park correspondent for the Denver newspaper. He also contributed articles to the Saturday Evening Post, urging that a national park be created in the region. In 1901, he established Longs Peak Inn, a rustic hostelry having cabins complete with steam heat and private baths, in order to encourage "city-folk" to visit Estes Park. Subsequently, he started a trail school to acquaint his guests with local nature lore. [3] As a prolific writer of nature stories Mills reached a far-flung public. Some of his most popular books were Wild Life in the Rockies, 1909, Beaver World, 1913, and Rocky Mountain Wonderland, 1915. Meanwhile, Mills publicized his park idea through another means, namely, his contact with the Forest Service. In 1907 President Theodore Roosevelt had appointed him to the Forest Service as an independent lecturer on forestry. For the next two years, Mills traveled extensively as an apostle for conservation and Colorado tourism. Then suddenly he turned against the Forest Service, which administered the Longs Peak area as part of the Medicine Bow National Forest, because the Forest Service opposed the establishment of a national park there.

It was in the spring of 1908 that the Estes Park Improvement and Protective Association met

to hear Wheeler lecture on protecting the animals of the region. He told the meeting that the establishment of a game refuge was a prerequisite for attracting large numbers of tourists. Although Mills did not attend this meeting, he wrote Wheeler, inquiring about the limits of the proposed game refuge. Wheeler replied that the boundaries might run from the Poudre River along the foothills, west to Estes Park. [6]

The next year, on September 4, at the annual meeting of the Association, the matter of how best to protect the wild birds, game and flowers in Estes Park again came up for discussion. The members then unanimously agreed to seek the cooperation of the federal government in establishing a game refuge, since much of the land in the Estes Park area was government owned. The proposed game refuge was to extend forty-two miles from east to west and twenty-four miles from north to south. [7]

Enos Mills' vision, however, encompassed something larger than a game refuge. In September, 1909, only days after the Association's meeting, he issued a statement for publication that was to serve as his platform for a national park.

Around Estes Park, Colorado, are mountain scenes of exceptional beauty and grandeur. In this territory is Longs Peak and one of the most rugged sections of the Continental Divide of the Rockies. The region is almost entirely above the altitude of 7,500 ft., and in it are forests, streams, waterfalls, snowy peaks, great canons, glaciers, scores of species of wild birds, and more than a thousand varieties of wild flowers.

In many respects this section is losing its wild charms. Extensive areas of primeval forests have been misused and ruined; saw-mills are humming and cattle are in the wild gardens! The once numerous big game has been hunted out of existence and the picturesque beaver are almost gone.

These scenes are already extensively used as places of recreation. If they are to be permanently and more extensively used and preserved, it will be necessary to hold them as public property and protect them within a national park. [8]

Within a year Mills gained a valuable ally in his campaign for a national park in the person of J. Horace McFarland, the President of the American Civic Association. While enthusiastic about Mills' plan, McFarland believed that the goal of a national park in the Longs Peak area could only be achieved after a "Bureau of National Parks" was created. According to McFarland, an observer sympathetic to the "park idea" might then visit Estes Park as a representative of the new bureau and bring back a report for the consideration of Congress. A bill could then be drawn embodying the observer's recommendations for a national park. [9]

Such legislative gamesmanship was not the style of the mercurial Mills. His generally unsophisticated mind saw the campaign as a struggle between good and evil. And in this conservationist crusade the angel of darkness wore the green of the Forest Service. Mills

was certain that the Forest Service was behind a malign conspiracy to kill his dream. He set about to acquaint the cautious McFarland with the nature of "the enemy." In February of 1911 he wrote:

A resolution condemning the Park proposition has been suggested to members of the State legislature by some one of the chiefs in the Denver Forest Service office; the suggestion that 'a game preserve is sufficient' is also being pushed by these people. 'A national park will lock up the resources in that region.' Balinger [sic; Secretary of the Interior Richard A. Ballinger] . . . is condemned and Enos Mills discredited. False issues are repeatedly raised; any point is raised that may reach or confuse the individual addressed. This activity enthusiastically extends to the Forest Supervisor and the rangers [sic] in this district. [10]

McFarland, duly alarmed, promised action to the combustible Mills.

. . . . we will get the Forest Service out in the open, and one of these days I will hang up a sign-board before Mr. President William H. Taft which will show him how one bureau of a department is openly and viciously fighting against another important department. [11]

The opposition appears more insidious in Mills' next communique on the National Park Service.

As you know their fight is largely under-cover and while one knows it is vicious it would be difficult to absolutely prove: they realize this and are going the limit of unfairness. [12]

A short time later Mills asserted: "Scratch any old Forest Service man and you will find a Tartar who is opposed to all National Parks." [13]

The audience to this fight was a public reportedly both apathetic and ignorant. McFarland lamented:

Most people conceive a park as a place in which to drive, it being decorated something like a cemetery, with images and borders and flower gardens. [14]

Then, too, there was some local opposition. This fact was evident in the correspondence sent to Congress bearing the letter-head of "The Front Range Setters' League," a small organization which, according to Mills, was actively subsidized by the Forest Service.

Nevertheless, neither apathy nor opposition could deter Mills. He was a man dedicated to a cause. Believing the Forest Service to be "the enemy of human liberty," Mills set off in the fall of 1911 on a speaking tour that included Kansas City, Omaha, St. Louis, Chicago, and Indianapolis before he reached his destination, Washington, D.C. There he met with Secretary of the Interior Walter Fisher, Senator Reed Smoot of Utah, and President Taft,

without receiving much satisfaction. Arriving home in the spring of 1912, Mills wearily wrote to McFarland, "This campaigning annihilates me and on arrival home I felt so aged . . ." [15] Yet, for all his work Mills, according to a contemporary, "had not gained an inch" in his fight for the park. [16]

In April, 1912, the same month that Mills had written so disconsolately to McFarland, the Colorado Mountain Club was formed. Under the leadership of its founder, Denver attorney James Grafton Rogers, it undertook to support the creation of a Rocky Mountain national park as one of its first major projects. A National Park Committee was soon established in the club, with Rogers' law partner, Morrison Shafroth, as chairman. [17] The club found that the plans for the national park were still nebulous. The available maps of Estes Park were amateurish and frequently in error. Questions of boundaries, acreage, and private property had not been fully studied, let alone solved.

Rogers later remembered the contributions of the Mountain Club in the park campaign. He wrote:

In these matters the Club could contribute more familiarity, and geographic knowledge than any agency in America. . . .

The Club also could and did reach the outdoor societies of America on a footing of confidence no Chamber of Commerce could gain. [18]

As Rogers recalled, the assistance of the conservation clubs in the fight "counted like the dickens in Congress." [19] The Colorado Mountain Club furthermore drew up the first outline of the Park's boundaries and drafted each of the Park Bills introduced in Congress.

The Mountain Club and Mills were not the only active advocates for the Park. There was also the Denver Chamber of Commerce. Its commitment dated back to December 1910 when its secretary, Thorndike Deland, pledged its support in correspondence with McFarland. [20] A "live" national park committee was established by the Chamber, with Frederick Ross, a noted Denver realtor, at its head, and the committee actively promoted the cause of creating a park.

By this time, Colorado political leaders could see the merits of a national park near Denver. The following "Memorial," directed to Congress, was passed by the Colorado State Legislature on February 25, 1913:

That the people of Colorado desire that said park shall be established. It includes the highest mountain peaks in the state; the area is little adapted to either agriculture or grazing; its scenery for sublimity and grandeur is easy of access to America's millions who seek health and recreation in the summer months, being situated in the front and main range of the Rocky Mountains. [21]

The legislature, in framing this statement, was probably motivated in part by a report

released two weeks earlier by the Chief Geographer of the United States Geological Survey, R.B. Marshall, concerning his recent trip to Estes Park. He had reached Estes Park on September 2, 1912, and after securing a pack train outfit, engaged in a topographic mapping on the Longs Peak quadrangle. Then in the company of two assistants from the survey party, Arthur Fisher and John Baker, Marshall began as detailed an inspection of the mountain area as was possible in his limited time of six days.

After completing his trip, Marshall talked with Mills and Charles E. Hewes of the Front Range Settlers' League before leaving for Denver. There he met with retiring Governor John F. Shafroth, Governor-elect Elias Ammons, Mayor H.J. Arnold, Frederick Ross and former U.S. Senator Thomas Patterson. In his discussions, Marshall discounted the commercial value of mining, timber, and grazing interests in the park area. He believed that the most attractive feature of the proposed park, aside from its scenic features, was its accessibility to Denver and other population centers. [22]

Throughout 1913 and 1914 more organizations rallied in support of the park idea. Besides the Denver Chamber of Commerce and the Colorado Mountain Club, support came from the Boulder and Greeley Commercial Clubs, the Denver Real Estate Exchange, the Denver Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Colorado State Federation of Women's Clubs. The Colorado Democratic State platform of 1914 urged the creation of a Rocky Mountain National Park. Furthermore, President Thomas B. Stearn of the Denver Chamber of Commerce renewed his organization's commitment by listing the passage of the park bill by Congress as the Chamber's foremost project in 1914. [23] Added impetus was given to the park movement by the work of the Colorado delegation in Washington, mainly Senators Charles S. Thomas and John F. Shafroth, along with Congressman Edward T. Taylor.

Still, in the words of James Grafton Rogers, "There were many hard nuts to crack, many compromises to make." The proposed Park area was thought to be too large; water users wondered about their rights; resort owners feared government control; property owners imagined that their lands would be condemned. Trouble also came from an unexpected quarter, the uncompromising Enos Mills.

Worn down by five years of almost constant campaigning, Mills became ever more critical of friend and foe alike. He even distrusted some of his supporters because they were more quietly ardent than he. As usual his confidant was J. Horace McFarland. It is not surprising that the "insolent," "arrogant," "IRRESPONSIBLE," "big" and "grass stealing" Forest Service was still considered a major target. [24] Unfortunately, Mills also began to attack those he should have considered allies. He chided Rogers for his "peculiar and tardy attention" to the park proposal. He furthermore protested against Rogers' supposed collusion with the Forest Service. [25]

Throughout the summer and winter of 1914 Mills in his free lance fashion managed to alienate or baffle many others working for the Park. In December of that year, McFarland felt compelled to warn him:

Your splendid work is being discounted because of the hostility toward the Forest Service. My feeling is that while these fine things in which we are greatly interested are being pushed along we ought to try to overcome some of the completely defensible animosities that have grown up. I do not trust the Forest Service any more than you do, but I do not want to let my feeling in that direction handicap the possibility of doing something for the National Parks. [26]

The recalcitrant Mills replied with indictments of Frederick Ross and Rogers. While he allowed that Ross wanted a national park, Mills nevertheless believed he was "a sincere, slow-going and a blind, ardent worshipper of the Forest Service." Mills' evaluation of Rogers required more ink and more venom. Although "a brilliant young lawyer," Rogers was "a typical politician," "a hypocrite," "a Forest Service mouthpiece," and the Park's "powerful enemy and alleged supporter." [27]

While Mills was writing these diatribes, much constructive work was being done for the park cause in Congress. As 1914 drew to a close, the bill for the creation of a Rocky Mountain National Park was presented for a third time. Twice before it had died in committee. Now Colorado formed a united front that was truly bipartisan. Before the House Public Lands Committee a number of Colorado officials testified for the bill. [28] Retiring Governor Elias M. Ammons opened the testimony with a statement on the projected expense of the Park's operation. The committee heard that Colorado had already begun building a twenty-one mile road through Estes Park at a cost of \$40,000. Later the committee was told that the estimated salary of the "supervisor" of the national park would be only \$2,100 a year and that the total federal expenditures for the first two years would not exceed \$25,000. [29]

Governor-elect George A. Carlson then spoke on park tourists. He reported that 56,000 people visited Estes Park in 1914, but he predicted that the number would almost double in 1915, with the visitors that would arrive in 25,000 automobiles. Congressman Edward T. Taylor stressed the accessibility of the Park to Denver, noting that the sixty mile distance could be covered in only three or four hours by auto. Senator John F. Shafroth contended that some of the nation's unfavorable balance of trade could be corrected by redirecting American tourists from the Swiss Alps to the Rocky Mountains. Then, after a letter was read from Secretary of Interior Franklin Lane favoring the park, Enos Mills concluded the formal statements with a "stirring plea." [30] For the committee's further edification, young Morrison Shafroth and Frank W. Byerly of Estes Park showed colored stereopticon pictures of the scenic features of the park area. The Colorado contingent left the meeting confident that victory would soon be theirs. [31]

In Colorado, the new year of 1915 brought little comment in the Denver newspapers on the park bill. Lengthy items about the Great War in Europe and the prospects of economic prosperity in Colorado crowded out references to a national park. The Rocky Mountain News contained an editorial about "a new era of development and prosperity for the state," and mentioned livestock, mining, farming, and industry—but nothing about the Park or tourism or scenery. [32] Furthermore, there was nothing in Governor Ammons' farewell

address or in Governor Carlson's inaugural message concerning the proposed national park.

The calm at home contrasted with the dogged activity of the Colorado delegation in Washington. The park bill, introduced in both houses on June 29, 1914, had already passed the Senate, mainly because of its skillful handling by Senator Thomas. In the House progress was slower. The Senate version of the bill had been sent to the House committee on Public Lands on October 9, 1914, where it remained until Congressman Taylor had it reported out on January 12, 1915. In the meantime, Taylor had arranged to have it placed on the calendar for passage under a suspension of rules on January 18, the earliest date for the consideration of bills on that calendar.

There was no quorum present on January 18 and a quorum call would have killed the bill. [33] However, promptly at 3:30 P.M. Speaker Champ Clark recognized Representative Taylor to call up the slightly amended Senate bill. After a forty minute debate, the measure was adopted almost unanimously by voice vote. [34] Regarding Taylor's efforts, "a Denverite" wrote to Frederick Ross, "His colleagues in the House haven't ceased to rub their eyes and wonder how he got away with it." [35] Taylor's accomplishment was supplemented on the following day when the Senate approved a modification adopted by the House, and on January 26, President Woodrow Wilson signed the bill. Thus Colorado obtained a 358.5 square mile national park.

The Rocky Mountain News was ecstatic over the outcome:

The people of Colorado have many things to be thankful for at the beginning of this new year, but perhaps none of them, not even the remarkable revival of the mining industry, means more to the future of the state than the creation of the Rocky Mountain National Park.

The passage of this bill is the crowning result of one of the best organized and most efficiently managed campaigns ever conducted by Colorado people to obtain any benefit for the state. [36]

Many organizations and personalities shared in the victory that was six years in coming. There is little doubt, however, that Enos Mills had been the major force behind the Park's creation. He, more than anyone else, deserved the title "Father of Rocky Mountain National Park," as given him by the Denver Post. The dedication ceremonies for the Park attracted dignitaries from the state capital, the national congress, and the Department of the Interior. It was fitting that the chairmanship of the proceedings was held by Enos Mills.

Unfortunately, the creation of the Park did not mark the end to controversy. In the years to come, Park policies ineptly administered or simply misunderstood would arouse local feeling against either the Park or, after 1916, the newly created National Park Service. Ironically, behind much of the criticism was the restless mind of Enos Mills.

ENDNOTES

1. Enos A. Mills, Early Estes Park, with biographical sketch by Esther B. Mills (Estes Park, Colorado, 1959), vii. In 1918 Mills married the former Esther A. Burnell of Eureka, Kansas. One daughter, Enda, was born to the couple in 1919.

2. Mills, Rocky Mountain National Park, p. 85.

Mills' major antagonist was H. N. Wheeler, the Chief Forester of the Colorado National Forest. Mills vociferously condemned what he considered to be the unwarranted tactics used by the Forest Service against his "park idea." [4] Wheeler later maintained that the Forest Service's objections were reasonable rather than malicious. He explained that the Forest Service "was not strong" for a national park because there was no Park Service to administer it. However, both Wheeler and the Forest Service favored a game refuge in the Estes Park region. In fact Wheeler contended that it was from his (Wheeler's) game refuge idea that Enos Mills developed his plans for a national park. [5]

3. Mills, Early Estes Park, xvi.

4. Mills, Rocky Mountain National Park, p. 88.

5. H. N. Wheeler had assumed charge of the old Colorado Forest in the summer of 1907, when people were just beginning to sell lots for the town of Estes Park. Prior to this time, Wheeler had been teaching school in Montrose, Colorado. He received an appointment in mid-July 1905 as ranger in the Gunnison Park Forest. On April 1, 1906, after having passed appropriate tests, he was given charge of the Montezuma Forest at Durango, Colorado.

In July, 1907 he left that post to head the old Colorado Forest, now called the Roosevelt National Forest, at one time a division of the Medicine Bow Range. Wheeler had charge of the Colorado Forest until January 1, 1921, except for the period from November, 1911 to April, 1913, when he re-organized the Cleveland Forest in California. Author's interview with H. N. Wheeler, December 20, 1963.

6. Ibid.

7. "To Whom It May Concern: Estes National Park and Game Preserve" January 21, 1910: Papers of J. Horace McFarland From File 80, Division of Public Records, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, State Museum Building, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Xeroxed copies found in Rocky Mountain National Park Library. Hereafter cited as Papers of McFarland.

8. Mills, Rocky Mountain National Park, p. 86.

9. Letter of J. Horace McFarland to Thorndike Deland, December 19, 1910. Papers of McFarland.

10. Letter of Enos Mills to J. Horace McFarland, February 1, 1911. Papers of McFarland.
11. Letter of J. Horace McFarland to Enos Mills, February 13, 1911. Papers of McFarland.
12. Letter of Enos Mills to J. Horace McFarland, February 19, 1911. Papers of McFarland.
13. Ibid., March 20, 1911. Papers of McFarland.
14. Letter of J. Horace McFarland to Enos Mills, March 24, 1911. Papers of McFarland.
15. Letter of Enos Mills to J. Horace McFarland, April 24, 1912. Papers of McFarland.
16. Author's interview with James Grafton Rogers, July 12, 1966.
17. James Grafton Rogers, "The Creation of Rocky Mountain National Park," Trail and Timberline, no. 558, June, 1965, p. 100.
18. Ibid.
19. Author's interview with James Grafton Rogers, July 12, 1966.
20. Letter of Thorndike Deland to J. Horace McFarland, December 10, 1910. Papers of McFarland.
21. Senate Joint Memorial No. 4, Report from Committee on Public Lands, 63rd Congress, 3rd Session, January 12, 1915, found in Edmund B. Rogers, "History of Legislation Relating to the National Park System Through the 82nd Congress," mimeographed copy, 1958, unnumbered pages. Rocky Mountain National Park Library.
22. Ibid.
23. The Denver Post, January 29, 1914.
24. Letter of Enos Mills to J. Horace McFarland, March 17, 1914. Papers of McFarland.
25. Letter of Enos Mills to James Grafton Rogers, May 3, 1914. Papers of McFarland.
26. Letter of J. Horace McFarland to Enos Mills, December 28, 1914. Papers of McFarland.
27. Letter of Enos Mills to J. Horace McFarland, December 31, 1914. Papers of McFarland.
28. Morrison Shafroth, "Seeing the Bill through Congress," Trail and Timberline, no. 558, June 1965, p. 103.
29. Ibid., p. 104.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Editorial in the Rocky Mountain News, January 1, 1915.

33. Ibid., January 28, 1915.

34. The Denver Post, January 18, 1915.

35. Rocky Mountain News, January 27, 1915.

36. Ibid., January 16, 1915.